



THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF THE GAMBIA

The Gambia operates on a 6-3-3-4 system:

Education level	Years of study/age	Certificate/Exam/Degree
Lower Basic School	6 years/ages 7–13	Grade six Placement Exam
Upper Basic School	3 years/ages 13–16	Basic Education Certificate Exam
Senior Secondary School	3 years/ages 16–19	West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE)
University (undergrad)	4 years	Bachelor's degree
University (grad)	1+ years	Master's degree

Language: The sole official language of instruction throughout the Gambian educational system is English.

Lower Basic and Upper Basic Schools (Grades 1-9): Until 2002, primary education lasted for six years and led to the Primary School Leaving Certificate (phased out). Secondary education was divided into junior secondary schools, which offered a three-year course leading to the Junior School Leaving Certificate, and Senior Secondary schools which offered a three-year course.

Since 2002, a new unified basic education system was introduced covering 1-9 years, through an automatic transition with no examination at the end of the lower basic cycle. The cycle is divided into two cycles: lower basic (Grades I–VI) and upper basic (Grades VII–IX). There are 368 Lower basic schools and 89 Upper basic schools in the Gambia. There is another type of school system called the basic cycle schools which is a combination of the lower and upper basic school (grades 1-9). All Gambian students take the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) at the end of grade 9 (ninth grade) in nine or ten subjects. Admission to Senior Secondary/High School is competitive. The vast majority of Gambian students attend government schools (75%); there are a growing number of private and international private secondary schools in the country offering Cambridge IGCSE/ O Levels or the Government's WASSCE.

	Age group		% of Total
Total Number of Schools		574	
Total Number of Basic Cycle School (combination of the lower and upper Basic School)	7-19	62	11%
Total Number of Lower Basic Schools	7-13	368	64%
Total Number of Upper Basic Schools	13-19	89	16%
Total Number of Senior Secondary School	16-19	55	10%

Source: National Statistic Abstract, academic year 2006/2007

Senior Secondary School (SSS): Senior secondary education (Grades 10–12) is for pupils between the ages of 16 and 19 years. Secondary schools offer a variety of subjects in science, arts and commerce. At the end of Grade 12, pupils sit for the West African Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) conducted by the West African Examinations Council. Students in all the 55 Senior High Schools take a Core curriculum consisting of English Language, Integrated Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies. Each student also takes three or four Elective subjects, chosen from one of seven groups: Sciences, "Arts" (social sciences and humanities), or Commerce (visual arts or home economics). The secondary school transcript should contain a letter or percentage grade for each subject, for each of three terms, for the three years of senior secondary school, equivalent to the tenth through twelfth grades. Students' Term Reports (transcript) contain rank in class for each subject as well as grades for classwork and end of term exams.

At the end of Senior Secondary/High School (twelfth grade), all students take the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination, or WASSCE, or IGCSE for some of the private schools. These exams are given nationwide in May-June each year, but the results are not available until the following October.

WASSCE Grading System

Credit Grades:

A1

B2

B3

C4, C5, C6

Pass Grades: not acceptable for tertiary admission

D7, E8

Failing Grade

F9

The minimum university standard for admission to post-secondary education is 5 credits on the WASSCE, including credits in math and English. U.S. universities should not admit Gambians students who have not attained at least this level. Students are expected to retake exams in subjects they have failed. Colleges should require a photocopy of the WASSCE Statement of Results bearing an original signature and stamp from the headmaster or headmistress, as well as the transcript. You are strongly encouraged to verify these documents at source, through the West African Examinations Council or by contacting the Educational Advisor at the address below.

The academic year runs from September to July with a long vacation from: Jul to: Sep, which also coincides with the rainy season in The Gambia.

Higher education: The University of The Gambia, created in 1999, offers programs which lead to a Bachelor's Degree after four years of study in Humanities and Social Studies, Economics and Management Science, and Nursing and Public Health; and six years in Medicine and Surgery. Another institution, The Gambia College, offers non-degree certificates and diplomas in Agriculture, Science, Education, Nursing and Midwifery and Public Health, Catering, Management Development and vocational training. Higher technical and vocational education is offered at the Gambia Technical Training Institute which offers courses leading to the examinations of the City and Guilds of London Institute and the Royal Society of Arts.

Gambians studying in the U.S: In the 2007–2008 academic year, 330 Gambian students were studying in the U.S. at various institutions.

Testing: The SAT is offered four times a year at one location in the capital city, Banjul. The GRE twice yearly and TOEFL computer-based test is offered monthly at the YMCA in Kanifing. Please note that students find it very difficult to get access to credit card to register for the SAT online, which significantly impedes the registration process. It is both difficult and expensive to draw a bank check in USD for registration fees, and significantly raises the cost of the test.

Educational Advising: The Educational Advising Centers in Fajara, sponsored by the Public Affairs Section of the United States Embassy, serves over 3,000 students per year in a wide range of programs designed to strengthen students' applications and their readiness for U.S. higher education. We are eager to work with you to make it possible for more Gambian students to enroll in your institution. Please contact the Educational Advisor, at the US Embassy, and refer your Gambian applicants to us for any assistance that we can provide.

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